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FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1573
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RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 1660

UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 001145

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: ERO PROTESTS AMBASSADOR'S REMARKS

REF: HCMC 1090 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) On October 6, the Deputy Chief of the Consular Section of the HCMC External Relations Office -- one of our most reliable contacts in the office - called in PolOff to protest the Ambassador's interview with Radio Free Asia on October 2. He told us that the GVN is "upset" that the Ambassador in his remarks had singled out the dissident "8406 Bloc" for support and reportedly called the group "brave." The GVN considers the 8406 bloc to be "dangerous and a source of instability" in Vietnam, the ERO official said.

¶2. (SBU) The ERO official said he did not know if the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) similarly convoked the Embassy. His instructions came directly from the Director of the HCMC ERO. (Note: Embassy Hanoi has not received any similar summons. End Note.)

¶3. (SBU) PolOff responded that we would need to verify the exact content of the Ambassador's statement, but the statement as read by the ERO is consistent with the longstanding U.S. position on human rights. For example, in his speech on U.S.-Vietnam relations in HCMC on September 20, the Ambassador noted the "need to give greater space to Vietnamese citizens to come together to express their ideas, promote political accountability and thus deepen public trust." The Ambassador, Consul General and other U.S. officials also have discussed these issues repeatedly and candidly in private with senior government counterparts, explaining why we meet both with GVN and Party officials, but also with dissenting voices in Vietnamese society. The United States does not support a particular group, but firmly believes that all groups and individuals should have the right to peacefully express their views, on politics and all other issues. The United States believes that the free exchange of ideas is a net plus for a society's development and overall stability.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: It is highly unusual for the ERO to call in the Consulate, in particular on a government to government issue and such demarches have always paralleled or followed action in Hanoi. The ERO Director may believe that a local jab at the Americans would burnish his Party credentials. Alternatively, since the 8406 Bloc's leadership is based in Hue and HCMC, it is possible that the ERO is signaling to us that pressure on this dissident group will intensify further in coming days. Per reftel reporting, three 8406 Bloc members currently are in police custody and a number of others have been in and out of detention over the past few months. End Comment.

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